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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000148

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [LO](#) [AF](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES FOR NATO SUMMIT SUCCESS,
AGREEMENT ON MISSILE DEFENSE LANGUAGE

REF: STATE 32646

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador Obsitnik met on March 31 to discuss U.S. priorities for the NATO Summit and to register his concern regarding an interview Prime Minister Fico gave to Czech television on March 30 in which he stated that the Slovak "government" was opposed to missile defense and that Slovakia would express its views at the upcoming NATO Summit. President Gasparovic replied firmly that his views were "different" and that Slovakia would not cause any problems on this issue at the Summit. (Comment: USNATO informed Post early April 1 that the Slovak government had adopted a stance in opposition to 25 Allies on Communiqué language on missile defense. Ambassador took the matter up with Foreign Minister Kubis and we understand that the Slovak delegation in Brussels subsequently backed away from changes sought by the Prime Minister on missile defense language. End Note.) President Gasparovic expressed agreement with reftel points on Macedonia and indicated he would be willing to speak to his Greek counterpart. In response to the Ambassador's urging that the GOS consider further changes to the draft media law, Gasparovic expressed his satisfaction with the current version, likening it to laws in place in other EU member states. End Summary.

NATO Summit/Missile Defense

¶2. (C) President Gasparovic agreed that Afghanistan would be the key issue for Bucharest and told the Ambassador that he had requested that the government accelerate its consultations on participation in a Canadian-led OMLT in Kandahar so that he could announce this plan at the Summit. With respect to enlargement, Gasparovic reiterated GOS support for the A-3 aspirants, although he mentioned that "some Allies" may harbor concerns about Albania's candidacy. In recent public comments, President Gasparovic expressed Slovak support for Croatia and Macedonia's candidacy, but was silent on Albania. Subsequently, FM Kubis clarified that the Foreign Ministry had included in its Summit-related recommendations to the government support for all three candidates. (Comment: The President's oversight was not entirely inadvertent, but related to his strong negative feelings about Kosovo independence. End Comment.)

¶3. (C) Gasparovic said he would be willing to speak with Greek officials about the importance for regional stability of Macedonia's accession. He added that it was his personal

view that the Greek position was unyielding and that only the U.S. might exert sufficient pressure to affect a compromise before the Summit. (Note: Ambassador delivered reftel points to FM Kubis, who also expressed agreement and a willingness to discuss with FM Bakoyannis. End note.)

¶4. (C) Ambassador then presented a copy of the text of a March 30 interview on Czech television with PM Fico is quoted as saying that he hoped that at the Summit there would be an explanation as to why "nobody asked anyone anything, and we suddenly found out that American military elements are supposed to show up in the territory of Europe." He added that U.S. missile defense plans "only bring nervousness to international relations, and divisions to Europe." "It is incredible that Europe watches in silence as the new era of deployment of foreign troops on European soil takes place."

¶5. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik criticized both the timing and the substance of the remarks and sought the President's assurance that Slovakia would adhere to its "official" policy. President Gasparovic replied that he would be leading the Slovak delegation and that his views were different. In any event, he implausibly explained, the Prime Minister meant that Slovakia wouldn't agree to host missile defense. Gasparovic stated that as a country neighboring the Czech Republic and Poland, Slovakia has opinions about missile defense and that the EU should express its views as well. That said, if the Czechs, Poles and the Alliance agree on a way forward, Slovakia would too. Gasparovic stressed that it would be best if the U.S. and Russia reached an accommodation on the issue, but that Slovakia would not take any steps against the prevailing consensus at Bucharest. Ambassador Obsitnik underscored continuing efforts by the U.S. to address stated Russian concerns and provided a brief update of the recent 2 plus 2 talks and the follow-up discussions in

Washington on March 26-27.

6.(C) We learned from USNATO on April 1 that the Slovak delegation had proposed two problematic changes to Summit communique language on missile defense. Ambassador raised with FM Kubis, who told him that the Slovak delegation would agree to drop one proposed change, but continue to press for the other. FM Kubis also confirmed that the GOS would, in the end, accept the language agreed earlier by 25 Allies. We understand from USNATO that the Slovak delegation's proposed change was strongly opposed by several delegations and that the Slovaks acquiesced in the original language.

Media Law

¶7. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question regarding coalition discussions on the controversial media law, President Gasparovic stated that, in his opinion, the law was fine. He framed the debate on the law as motivated by politics and publishers' concerns for the bottom line. Several European countries have a so-called "right of response," so why shouldn't Slovakia, Gasparovic asked. No one outside of Slovakia will have a problem with the final bill, he added. If the opposition and the media don't like it, they can seek recourse in the courts. The majority rules, said Gasparovic, adding: "that's democracy." Ambassador Obsitnik urged the government to negotiate an acceptable compromise with the opposition, noting that the longer the controversy continued the worse it would be for the country. Gasparovic was highly critical of the opposition's decision to link the media law with the Lisbon Treaty and said it (the opposition) would have to think hard about the consequences of its threat not to support the Treaty. President Gasparovic's foreign policy advisor added somewhat curiously that "Russia is criticized for not having a "right of response," and we are criticized for having one."

Comment

¶8. (C) The long-running divide between Prime Minister's

Fico's "personal" opposition to missile defense and GOS official policy on the issue blew up not only in Brussels, but also on the front page of PM Fico's bete noir, the Slovak daily "SME." The paper's headline on April 1 reads: "Fico against (MD), President is not." Under the headline, the text continues: "Prime Minister said that the government is against radar, official position will be different." The article states that neither the Defense Minister, the Foreign Minister, nor the President oppose the radar and quotes the President's spokesman as saying that Gasparovic's view represented the official position. Knowing the Prime Minister's overweening sensitivity to what he perceives to be anti-government biases of the press, SME's front page mischief surely angered Fico and could have further encouraged his stance on the Summit's MD language. We attribute the apparent hardening of his position also to a desire to boost his good friend, Czech opposition leader Jiri Paroubek, and to please the Russian government. Fico, who will not attend the NATO Summit, will instead be hosting his Russian counterpart, PM Zubkov, here in Bratislava. We will report septel on the visit of PM Zubkov, but are already bracing for further unwelcome rhetorical flights -- including on missile defense and Kosovo -- from Prime Minister Fico as the week unfolds. End comment.

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